

SURVEY: MOST AMERICANS WORRY ABOUT DROUGHT, WANT SHIFT TO CLEANER ENERGY TO AVOID WATER SHORTAGES, POLLUTION

Two Thirds of Americans Favor More Federal Action to Address Extreme Weather Woes, Concerns Higher in Drought-Hit States of AZ, CA, CO, FL, GA, MO, NV, NM, SC and TX.

BOSTON, MA.///August 16, 2012//Water -- and how to protect it in the face of worsening drought conditions -- is now a hot topic across America.

Faced with record-breaking 2012 summer heat, 81 percent of Americans are concerned about “increased drought” and other extreme weather conditions, according to a major new ORC International survey conducted for the nonprofit and nonpartisan Civil Society Institute (CSI). In addition to the national poll data, more detailed results were presented for the drought-hit states of Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Missouri, Nevada, New Mexico, South Carolina, and Texas.

Conducted July 26-30, 2012, the CSI survey found that concerns about drought go hand in hand with worries about water shortages and also how to avoid making them worse. Three out of four Americans -- including 61 percent of Republicans, 84 percent of Democrats and 80 percent of Independents -- think that “with all the current concern about severe drought and the risk of water shortages, America needs to start focusing more on alternative energy sources, such as wind and solar, that require less water.” This view is shared consistently across nearly all drought-stricken states surveyed.

Other key findings include the following:

- Shortages of safe drinking water due to drought and “the diversion of water for energy production” is the No. 1 overall worry in the 10 drought-stricken states with 63 percent “very concerned,” reaching highs of 74 percent in Florida and 71 percent in Georgia. Nationwide, nearly two thirds (64 percent) of Americans are “very concerned” about the prospect of “possible shortages of safe drinking water” due to drought and diversion for energy production. This issue is topped nationally only by concerns about higher food prices (66 percent), and is trailed by higher gasoline prices (61 percent), higher utility bills (49 percent), and diminished recreational activities (24 percent).
- Well over four out of five Americans (85 percent) -- including 76 of Republicans, 91 percent of Democrats and 88 percent of Independents -- say that the availability of ample clean water should be a top national priority for the U.S. In drought-hit states, the total rises to 86 percent in California and 90 percent in Georgia.
- About two out of three Americans (65 percent) think “the national government needs to do more to address extreme weather impacts.” In drought states, views on this issue are strongest in Nevada (69 percent) and Florida (76 percent).
- Americans want an energy/water “road map” for the U.S. Nearly nine out of 10 Americans (89 percent) -- including 86 percent of Republicans, 93 percent of Democrats and 85 percent of Independents -- believe that “U.S. energy planning and decision making must be made with full knowledge and understanding about the availability of water regionally and locally, and the impact this water use from specific energy choices has on their economies, including agricultural production.”

Pam Solo, president, Civil Society Institute, said: **“We now understand all too well the harsh realities of the current drought and its relationship to changes in the climate from global warming.**

America’s ‘all of the above’ non-solution for electricity generation is a dead-end path -- one requiring vast amounts of water for coal-fired power plants, nuclear reactors and the fracking extraction of natural gas. It didn’t have to be like this. In 2005, the Congress mandated that the U.S. Department of Energy produce a water/energy roadmap. Seven years later, we have neither a roadmap nor even a general understanding of what water resources we do have. We don’t know what the competition between energy, agriculture, industrial and residential uses will mean for

food security and the dependability and costs of energy sources that are reliant on increasingly scarce water. The sad truth is that we are flying blind today when we could have had the foundation for a national water/energy plan in place years ago.”

Heather White, general counsel, Environmental Working Group, said: **"Across the political spectrum, Americans are united in their understanding that an ample supply of clean water is essential to our health and to our energy future. This drought and the other extreme weather events we are experiencing provide a painful reminder of that reality. We must move to a clean energy future that doesn't solely consider carbon emissions; it must also safeguard the quality of our drinking water and the overall environment. The vast majority of Americans know that the same business-as-usual and 'all of the above' approach to energy policy simply isn't going to get us there. We must have a fundamental shift toward clean alternatives like wind and solar instead of doubling down on water-intensive and potentially dangerous energy sources like fracking and nuclear power."**

Pollster Graham Hueber, senior researcher, ORC International, said: **"The old expression is that everyone talks about the weather, but no one does anything about it. That may not be the case when it comes to drought that poses a threat to the availability of clean water. Driven by their concerns about drought, a strong majority of Americans responding to this survey were open to making choices – such as more wind and solar power – if doing so would avoid worsening the water shortages brought on by drought. In looking across party lines, we see broadly bipartisan sharing of both concerns about drought and support for more 'water friendly' energy alternatives."**

Seth Sheldon, senior water and energy analyst, Civil Society Institute, said: **"The water/energy nexus in a period of drought and water shortages is something we can ill afford to ignore. On average, nearly 50 percent of the water withdrawn in the US is used by thermoelectric power plants for cooling and the generation of steam for power. Facilities that use 'once-through' cooling withdraw huge quantities of water from lakes and rivers and return the water at a much higher temperature to the detriment of downstream ecosystems. Facilities that use 'recirculating' cooling withdraw less water, but that water is evaporated away and lost to the atmosphere. Both types of power plants are critically dependent on water and prone to pollution of the same."**

OTHER KEY SURVEY FINDINGS

- Seven out of 10 Americans – including 63 percent of Republicans, 76 percent of Democrats and 70 percent of Independents – support a “precautionary principle” approach to addressing water and energy issues. The 70 percent endorsed the following statement: “The precautionary principle would advocate a conservative approach to the use of technologies that may put public health at risk and create irreversible environmental harm. If there is not enough scientific evidence showing that it is safe, precaution should guide decisions in those cases.”
- Two thirds of Americans – including 50 percent of Republicans, 78 percent of Democrats, and 68 percent of Independents – now think that climate change is “real” or “appears to be happening”. Only 6 percent of Americans now say that climate change is “definitely not happening”. Residents in nine out of 10 drought states – ranging from a low of 63 percent in Texas to highs of 76 percent in Florida and 80 percent in California – are as or more likely than the rest of America to think that climate change is real.
- Of those Americans who say that they think climate change is real or appears to be happening, 73 percent – including 65 percent of Republicans, 78 percent of Democrats and 68 percent of Independents -- have been influenced in their views by “recent extreme weather events in the United States -- including drought, wildfires, high-wind storms, and other developments.” In drought-stricken states, two-thirds of those who recognize the existence of climate change have been influenced by recent weather events, reaching highs of 80 percent of those surveyed in Texas and Florida.

- About two in five Americans (39 percent) have “personally experienced the impact of drought in the last year.” In drought-hit states, this jumps to highs of 74 percent in Missouri, 69 percent in Texas, 63 percent in New Mexico, and 62 percent in Colorado.
- More than three quarters of Americans (77 percent) -- including 62 percent of Republicans, 88 percent of Democrats and 83 percent of Independents – are concerned about the drilling process known as fracking. Nearly three out of five Americans (58 percent) are aware of “fracking” today, compared to 27 percent who said they know nothing about it.
- About four out of five Americans (79 percent) -- including 77 percent of Republicans, 83 percent of Democrats and 80 percent of Independents -- support “tighter public disclosure requirements as well as studies of the health and environmental consequences of the chemicals used in natural gas drilling.”

For full survey findings, go to <http://www.CivilSocietyInstitute.org> on the Web.

METHODOLOGY

The ORC International report conducted a nationally representative telephone survey among a sample of 1,017 adults. Oversamples of at least 150 adults were also conducted in each of the following states: Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Missouri, Nevada, New Mexico, South Carolina and Texas. The survey was conducted during the period of July 26-30, 2012. The margin of error for the national survey is plus or minus three percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level. The margin of error for each of the state surveys is plus or minus eight percentage points.

ABOUT CSI

Based in Newton, MA, the nonprofit and nonpartisan Civil Society Institute (<http://www.CivilSocietyInstitute.org>) is a think tank that serves as a catalyst for change by creating problem-solving interactions among people, and between communities, government and business that can help to improve society. Since 2003, CSI has conducted more than 25 major national and state-level surveys and reports on energy and auto issues, including vehicle fuel-efficiency standards, consumer demand for hybrids/other highly-fuel efficient vehicles, global warming and renewable energy. In addition to being a co-convener of TheCLEAN.org (<http://www.TheClean.org>), the Civil Society Institute also is the parent organization of the Hybrid Owners of America (<http://www.HybridOwnersofAmerica.org>).

EWG is a nonprofit research organization based in Washington, D.C. that uses the power of information to protect human health and the environment. <http://www.ewg.org>.

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EDITOR’S NOTE: A streaming audio replay of the news event will be available on the Web at <http://www.CivilSocietyInstitute.org> as of 5 p.m. EDT on August 16, 2012.